

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (Previously Presented) A spinal fusion system for use as a prosthetic implant comprising:
 - a housing dimensioned to be situated between adjacent spinal bones, said housing defining a graft area;
 - said housing comprising at least one wall that defines an opening after said housing is situated between said adjacent spinal bones to permit in-situ loading of graft material;
 - a cover for covering said opening to facilitate preventing anterior migration of said graft material; and
 - said cover adapted to be secured to at least one of said adjacent spinal bones such that it permits said housing to migrate or float relative to said cover.
2. (Original) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 1 wherein said housing is generally U-shaped.
3. (Previously Presented) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 1 wherein said housing surrounds said graft area and cooperates with said adjacent spinal bones to define a caged area comprising a predetermined shape and defining an anterior opening to permit said in-situ loading of said graft material.
4. (Original) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 3 wherein said predetermined shape causes said graft material to be formed into a multi-sided fused coupling between said adjacent spinal bones.

Serial No. 10/675,361

5. (Original) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 3 wherein said predetermined shape defines a height of at least 2 millimeters and less than 180 millimeters.

6. (Cancelled)

7. (Previously Presented) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 1 wherein said cover is adapted to be secured to at least one of said adjacent spinal bones.

8. (Previously Presented) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 7 wherein said cover is adapted to provide mechanical fixation of said adjacent spinal bones.

9. (Previously Presented) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 7 wherein said cover is adapted to be secured to each of said adjacent spinal bones.

10. (Previously Presented) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 1 wherein said cover is adapted to be secured to said adjacent spinal bones to fix the spatial relationship between them and substantially simultaneously covering said graft area.

11. (Original) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 1 wherein a single cage is used during a multiple level vertebrectomy or discectomy in place of a plurality of spinal bones or plurality of discs, respectively.

12. (Previously Presented) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 1 wherein said cover is fitted to said housing either by mechanical attachment or by floating adjacency allowing for settling and controlled motion of said adjacent spinal bones.

13. (Original) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 1 wherein said housing comprises migration preventers for preventing said housing from migrating toward a spinal cord or other neurological elements after said housing is situated between said adjacent spinal bones.

14. (Original) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 13 wherein said migration preventers comprise at least one tab.

15. (Previously Presented) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 13 wherein said migration preventers comprise a plurality of tabs adapted to engage said adjacent spinal bones when said housing is situated therebetween.

16. (Previously Presented) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 15 wherein said plurality of tabs are adapted to engage said adjacent spinal bones when said housing is situated therebetween.

17. (Previously Presented) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 1 wherein said housing further comprises:

a first wall portion and a second wall portion, said first and second wall portions being integrally formed into said housing and defining a channel area for receiving said cover.

18. (Original) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 17 wherein said first and second wall portions extend beyond said housing.

19. (Currently Amended) The spinal fusion system as ~~recite~~ recited in claim 17 wherein said first and second wall portions each comprising a beveled edge, said cover also comprising beveled edges for mating with said beveled edges of said first and second wall portions when said cover is situated over said opening.

20. (Original) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 19 wherein said first and second wall portions extend beyond said housing and define a plurality of migration preventers for preventing said housing from migrating toward a spinal cord or other neurological structure after said housing is situated between said adjacent spinal bones.

21. (Previously Presented) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 20 wherein said migration preventers comprise a plurality of tabs defined by a first wall portion and a second wall portion, said plurality of tabs adapted to engage said adjacent spinal bones when said housing is situated there between.

22. (Previously Presented) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 15 wherein said plurality of tabs are adapted to engage said adjacent spinal bones when said housing is situated therebetween.

23. (Original) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 1 wherein said system further comprises at least one migration stop for preventing anterior migration of said housing.

24. (Previously Presented) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 23 wherein at least one migration stop cooperates with said cover to prevent said anterior migration.

25. (Original) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 23 wherein said system further comprises a plurality of migration stops.

26. (Currently Amended) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim ~~25~~ 23 wherein said at least one migration stop is a cross member secured to said housing.

27. (Currently Amended) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim ~~24~~ 25 wherein said plurality of migration stops ~~is~~ comprises a cross member secured to said housing.

28. (Original) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 20 wherein said system further comprises at least one migration stop for preventing anterior migration of said housing.

29. (Previously Presented) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 28 wherein said at least one migration stop cooperates with said cover to prevent said anterior migration.

30. (Original) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 28 wherein said system further comprises a plurality of migration stops.

31. (Previously Presented) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 1 wherein said spinal fusion system comprises a plurality of housings each comprising an opening for receiving graft material;

said cover covering said opening of each of said plurality of housings.

32. (Previously Presented) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 31 wherein said plurality of housings comprises a first housing adapted to be located between a first pair of spinal bones and a second housing adapted to be located between a second pair of spinal bones, said cover being adapted to be secured to a plurality of spinal bones to thereby cover said openings.

33. (Previously Presented) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 31 wherein said cover is situated in operative relationship to said plurality of housings to allow for settling or motion of said adjacent spinal bones.

34. (Previously Presented) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 1 wherein said cover comprises at least one resilient detent associated with an opening for permitting a screw to be situated in said opening and adapted to be screwed into said adjacent spinal bones, said at least one resilient detent adapted to prevent said screw from withdrawing from said adjacent spinal bone.

35. (Previously Presented) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 34 wherein said at least one resilient detent comprises a spring detent integral with said cover.

36. (Previously Presented) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 1 wherein said cover comprises a plate member and an integral lock for preventing withdrawal of at least one screw.

37. (Currently Amended) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 36 wherein said ~~generally planar plate~~ member comprises a resilient member integrally formed in said member;

said resilient member comprising a detent portion,

said resilient member moving from a home position when said at least one screw is received in said cover and returning to said home position after said at least one screw clears said detent portion.

38. (Currently Amended) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim ~~36~~ 37 wherein said resilient member is generally L-shaped in cross-section.

39. (Currently Amended) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim ~~38~~ 37 wherein said ~~cover plate member~~ comprises a ~~plate comprising~~ titanium.

40. (Previously Presented) A spinal bones fusing system comprising:

a housing adapted to be situated between a first spinal bone and a second spinal bone;

said housing being generally U-shaped and cooperating with said first and second spinal bones to define an opening that opens into a graft area for receiving graft material; and

a cover for covering said opening to facilitate preventing anterior migration of said graft material;

said cover being adapted to be secured to at least one of said first or second spinal bones such that it permits said housing to migrate or float relative to said cover while said cover is covering said opening.

41. (Previously Presented) The spinal bones fusing system as recited in claim 40 wherein said housing comprises a first leg portion, a second leg portion and a joining portion joining said first and second leg portions, said joining portion adapted to be situated between a spinal cord and said opening when said housing is situated between said first and second spinal bones.

Serial No. 10/675,361

42. (Previously Presented) The spinal bones fusing system as recited in claim 40 wherein said graft area comprises a predetermined shape and defines an anterior graft opening to permit anterior loading of said graft material into said graft area.

43. (Previously Presented) The spinal bones fusing system as recited in claim 42 wherein said predetermined shape causes said graft material to be formed into a multi-sided fused coupling between said first and second spinal bones.

44. (Original) The spinal bones fusing system as recited in claim 42 wherein said predetermined shape defines a height of at least 2 millimeters and less than 180 millimeters.

45. (Cancelled)

46. (Previously Presented) The spinal bones fusing system as recited in claim 40 wherein said cover is adapted to be secured to at least one of said first or second spinal bones.

47. (Previously Presented) The spinal bones fusing system as recited in claim 46 wherein said cover is adapted to be secured to each of said first and second spinal bones.

48. (Previously Presented) The spinal bones fusing system as recited in claim 40 wherein said cover is adapted to be secured to said housing.

49. (Previously Presented) The spinal bones fusing system as recited in claim 40 wherein said housing comprises migration preventers for preventing said housing from migrating toward a spinal cord or other neurological structure after said housing is situated between said spinal bones.

50. (Previously Presented) The spinal bones fusing system as recited in claim 49 wherein said migration preventers comprise at least one tab.

51. (Previously Presented) The spinal bones fusing system as recited in claim 49 wherein said migration preventers comprise a plurality of tabs adapted to engage said adjacent spinal bones when said housing is situated there between.

52. (Currently Amended) The spinal bones fusing system as recited in claim 51 wherein said plurality of tabs are adapted to engage said adjacent spinal bones when said housing is situated ~~there between~~ therebetween.

53. (Previously Presented) The spinal bones fusing system as recited in claim 40 wherein said housing further comprises:

a first wall portion and a second wall portion, said first and second wall portions being integrally formed into said housing and defining a channel area for receiving said cover.

54. (Previously Presented) The spinal bones fusing system as recited in claim 53 wherein said first and second wall portions extend beyond said housing.

55. (Currently Amended) The spinal bones fusing system as ~~recite~~ recited in claim 53 wherein said first and second wall portions each comprising a beveled edge, said cover also comprising beveled edges for mating with said beveled edges of said first and second wall portions when said cover is situated over said opening.

56. (Previously Presented) The spinal bones fusing system as recited in claim 53 wherein said first and second wall portions extend beyond said housing and define a plurality of migration preventers for preventing said housing from migrating toward a spinal cord or other neurological structure after said housing is situated between said adjacent spinal bones.

57. (Previously Presented) The spinal bones fusing system as recited in claim 56 wherein said migration preventers comprise a plurality of tabs defined by said first and second wall portions, said plurality of tabs adapted to engage said first or second spinal bones when said housing is situated there between.

58. (Previously Presented) The spinal bones fusing system as recited in claim 51 wherein said plurality of tabs are adapted to engage said first or second spinal bones when said housing is situated therebetween.

59. (Original) The spinal bones fusing system as recited in claim 40 wherein said system further comprises at least one migration stop for preventing anterior migration of said housing.

60. (Previously Presented) The spinal bones fusing system as recited in claim 40 wherein said spinal bones fusing system further comprises at least one migration stop that cooperates with said cover to prevent said anterior migration of said housing.

61. (Previously Presented) The spinal bones fusing system as recited in claim 59 wherein said system further comprises a plurality of migration stops.

62. (Original) The spinal bones fusing system as recited in claim 61 wherein said plurality of migration stops are cross members secured to said housing.

63. (Currently Amended) The spinal bones fusing system as recited in claim 59 wherein said at least one [[of]] migration stop is a cross member secured to said housing.

64. (Original) The spinal bones fusing system as recited in claim 46 wherein said system further comprises at least one migration stop for preventing anterior migration of said housing.

65. (Original) The spinal bones fusing system as recited in claim 64 wherein said spinal bones fusing system further comprises a cover for covering said opening, said at least one migration stop cooperating with said cover to prevent said anterior migration.

66. (Original) The spinal bones fusing system as recited in claim 64 wherein said system further comprises a plurality of migration stops.

67. (Previously Presented) The spinal bones fusing system as recited in claim 40 wherein said spinal bones fusing system comprises a plurality of housings each comprising an opening for receiving graft material;

said cover covering said opening of each of said plurality of housings.

68. (Previously Presented) The spinal bones fusing system as recited in claim 67 wherein said plurality of housings comprises a first housing adapted to be located between a first pair of spinal bones and a second housing adapted to be located between a second pair of spinal bones, said cover adapted to be secured to a plurality of spinal bones to thereby cover said openings.

69. (Previously Presented) The spinal bones fusing system as recited in claim 40 wherein said graft area comprises a length that generally corresponds to a length of a single spinal bone.

70. (Original) The spinal bones fusing system as recited in claim 40 wherein said graft area comprises a length that generally corresponds to a length of a plurality of spinal bones.

71. (Previously Presented) The spinal bones fusing system as recited in claim 40 wherein said cover comprises a plate member and an integral lock for preventing withdrawal of at least one screw.

72. (Currently Amended) The spinal bones fusing system as recited in claim 71 wherein said ~~generally planar plate~~ member comprises a resilient member integrally formed in said plate member;

said resilient member comprising a detent portion,

said resilient member moving from a home position when said at least one screw is received in said cover and returning to said home position after said screw clears said detent portion.

73. (Previously Presented) The spinal bones fusing system as recited in claim 72 wherein said resilient member is generally L-shaped in cross-section.

74. (Currently Amended) The spinal bones fusing system as recited in claim ~~73~~ 72 wherein said cover comprises a plate comprising titanium.

75. (Previously Presented) A method for fusing spinal bones together, comprising the steps of:

situating a cage in a graft area between spinal bones, said cage adapted to cooperate with said spinal bones to define an anterior opening for introducing graft material into said graft area;

situating said graft material through said anterior opening and into said graft area;

and

covering said anterior opening with a cover;

said cover adapted to be secured to at least one of said spinal bones such that it permits said cage to migrate or float relative to said cover while covering said anterior opening.

76. (Currently Amended) The method as recited in claim 75 wherein said method further comprises the step of:

inserting said cage between said spinal bones until at least one migration ~~preventer~~ preventer stops said cage from migrating toward a spinal cord or other neurological structure.

77. (Currently Amended) The method as recited in claim 76 wherein said method further comprises the step of:

inserting said cage between said spinal bones until said at least one migration ~~preventer~~ preventer engages at least one of said spinal bones.

78. (Original) The method as recited in claim 75 wherein said covering step further comprises the step of securing a cover to said spinal bones in order to cover said opening.

79. (Currently Amended) The method as recited in claim 75 wherein said cage comprises a shape generally corresponding to a size of a single spinal bones bone.

80. (Original) The method as recited in claim 75 wherein said cage comprises a shape generally corresponding to a size of multiple spinal bones.

81. (Original) The method as recited in claim 75 wherein said method further comprises the step of:

situating a plurality of cages into a plurality of graft areas, each of said plurality of cages cooperating with a plurality of spinal bones to define a plurality of graft openings.

82. (Original) The method as recited in claim 81 wherein said method further comprises the step of:

securing a cover to said spinal bones, said cover covering each of said plurality of graft openings.

83. (Original) The method as recited in claim 75 wherein said method further comprises the steps of:

removing said cover; and

inserting a second cage into a second graft area between two spinal bones, said second cage cooperating with said spinal bones to define a second anterior opening for introducing graft material into said second graft area;

securing said cover to said spinal bones to cover said anterior opening and said second anterior opening.

84. (Previously Presented) An implant for facilitating grafting spinal bones together, comprising:

a housing for situating between said spinal bones, said housing cooperating with said spinal bones to define a graft area and an opening for introducing graft material into said graft opening; and

a cover adapted to be secured to said spinal bones;

said cover not being secured to said housing and substantially simultaneously covering said opening after said graft material is situated in said graft area such that it permits said housing to migrate or float relative to said cover mounted over said opening.

85. (Original) The implant as recited in claim 84 wherein said opening is an anterior opening.

86. (Original) The implant as recited in claim 84 wherein said cover fixes said spinal bones in a predetermined position.

87. (Previously Presented) The implant as recited in claim 86 wherein said cover permits said housing to move relative to said cover after said cover is adapted to be secured to said spinal bones.

88. (Previously Presented) The implant as recited in claim 86 wherein said graft area comprises a dimension that generally corresponds to a dimension of a single spinal bone.

89. (Original) The implant as recited in claim 86 wherein graft area comprises a dimension that generally corresponds to a dimension of multiple spinal bones.

90. (Original) The implant as recited in claim 84 wherein said housing is generally U-shaped.

91. (Previously Presented) The implant as recited in claim 84 wherein said housing cooperates with said spinal bones to define an anterior opening that permits said graft material to be situated in said graft area after said housing is adapted to be situated between said spinal bones.

92. (Previously Presented) The implant as recited in claim 84 wherein said housing comprises migration preventers for preventing said housing from migrating toward a spinal cord or other neurological structure after said housing is adapted to be situated between said spinal bones.

93. (Previously Presented) The implant as recited in claim 92 wherein said migration preventers comprise at least one tab.

94. (Previously Presented) The implant as recited in claim 92 wherein said migration preventers comprise a plurality of tabs that are adapted to engage said spinal bones when said housing is situated there between.

95. (Currently Amended) The implant as recited in claim 94 ~~93~~ wherein said ~~plurality of tabs~~ are at least one tab is adapted to engage said spinal bones when said housing is situated therebetween.

96. (Original) The implant as recited in claim 84 wherein said housing further comprises:
a first wall portion and a second wall portion, said first and second wall portions being integrally formed into said housing and defining a channel area for receiving said cover.

97. (Original) The implant as recited in claim 96 wherein said first and second wall portions define an area for receiving said cover between said first and second wall portions.

98. (Currently Amended) The implant as ~~recite~~ recited in claim 96 wherein said first and second wall portions each ~~comprising~~ comprise a beveled edge, said cover also comprising beveled edges for mating with said beveled edges of said first and second wall portions when said cover is situated over said opening.

99. (Previously Presented) The implant as recited in claim 96 wherein said first and second wall portions comprise elongated portions that extend beyond said housing to define a plurality of migration preventers for preventing said housing from migrating toward a spinal cord or other neurological structure after said housing is situated between said spinal bones.

100. (Previously Presented) The implant as recited in claim 99 wherein said migration preventers comprise a plurality of tabs defined by said first and second wall portions, said plurality of tabs adapted to engage said spinal bones when said housing is situated therebetween.

101. (Previously Presented) The implant as recited in claim 100 wherein said plurality of tabs are adapted to engage said spinal bones when said housing is situated therebetween.

102. (Currently Amended) The implant as recited in claim 84 wherein said ~~system~~ implant further comprises at least one migration stop for preventing anterior migration of said housing.

103. (Original) The implant as recited in claim 102 wherein said at least one migration stop cooperates with said cover to prevent said anterior migration.

Serial No. 10/675,361

104. (Currently Amended) The implant as recited in claim 102 wherein said-system implant further comprises a plurality of migration stops.

105. (Original) The implant as recited in claim 104 wherein said plurality of migration stops are cross members secured to said housing.

106. (Currently Amended) The implant as recited in claim 92 wherein said-system implant further comprises at least one migration stop for preventing anterior migration of said housing.

107. (Original) The implant as recited in claim 106 wherein said at least one migration stop cooperates with said cover to prevent said anterior migration.

108. (Currently Amended) The implant as recited in claim 107 wherein said system implant further comprises a plurality of migration stops.

109. (Original) The implant as recited in claim 108 wherein said plurality of migration stops are cross members secured to said housing.

110. (Previously Presented) The implant as recited in claim 84 wherein said implant comprises a plurality of housings, each defining said opening for receiving graft material;
said cover covering each opening of each of said plurality of housings after said cover is secured to said spinal bones.

111. (Previously Presented) The implant as recited in claim 110 wherein said plurality of housings comprises a first housing adapted to be located between a first pair of spinal bones and a second housing adapted to be located between a second pair of spinal bones, said cover adapted to be secured to a plurality of spinal bones to thereby cover said openings while simultaneously fixing said spinal bones relative to each other.

112. (Previously Presented) The implant as recited in claim 84 wherein said cover comprises a generally planar member and an integral lock for preventing withdrawal of at least one screw after said at least one screw is received in said cover.

113. (Currently Amended) The implant as recited in claim 112 wherein said generally planar member comprises a resilient member integrally formed in said plate member;

said resilient member comprising a detent portion,

said resilient member moving from a home position in response to said at least one screw being screwed and returning to said home position after said at least one screw clears said detent portion.

114. (Original) The implant as recited in claim 113 wherein said resilient member is generally L-shaped in cross-section.

115. (Currently Amended) The implant as recited in claim ~~114~~ 84 wherein said cover comprises a titanium plate.

116. (Previously Presented) A method for fusing spinal bones together, comprising the steps of:

providing a housing for situating between spinal bones, said housing cooperating with said spinal bones to define an opening for introducing graft material into said graft area after said housing is situated between said spinal bones;

enabling said graft material to be introduced through said opening and into said graft area after said housing is situated between said spinal bones; and

providing a plate adapted to be secured to said spinal bones to fix said spinal bones into a predetermined position relative to each other and to facilitate covering said opening after said graft material is introduced into said graft area such that said housing can float or migrate relative to said plate.

117. (Cancelled)

118. (Currently Amended) The method as recited in claim 116 wherein said method further comprises the step of:

providing a housing comprising at least one migration ~~preventer~~ preventer that enables said housing to be inserted between said spinal bones until at least one migration ~~preventer~~ preventer stops said housing from migrating toward a spinal cord or other neurological structure.

119. (Currently Amended) The method as recited in claim 118 wherein said method further comprises the step of:

inserting said housing between said spinal bones until said at least one migration ~~preventer~~ preventer engages at least one of said spinal bones.

120. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 116 wherein said covering step further comprises the step of securing said plate to said spinal bones in order to cover said opening.

121. (Currently Amended) The method as recited in claim 116 wherein said housing comprises a shape generally corresponding to a size of a single spinal ~~bones~~ bone.

122. (Original) The method as recited in claim 116 wherein said housing comprises a shape generally corresponding to a size of multiple spinal bones.

123. (Original) The method as recited in claim 116 wherein said method further comprises the step of:

situating a plurality of housings into a plurality of graft areas, each of said plurality of housings cooperating with a plurality of spinal bones to define a plurality of graft openings.

124. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 116 wherein said method further comprises the steps of:

providing a plate that can be detachably secured to said spinal bones to permit a second housing to be inserted into a patient, said second housing cooperating with spinal bones to provide a second opening, said plate covering both said opening and said second opening after it is secured to said spinal bones.

125. (Original) The method as recited in claim 116 wherein said method further comprises the step of:

providing a housing that is generally U-shaped.

126. – 130. (Cancelled)

131. (Previously Presented) A spinal fusion system for use as a prosthetic implant comprising:

a housing dimensioned to be situated between adjacent spinal bones, said housing defining a graft area for receiving a graft or graft-like material for generating a fusion between said adjacent spinal bones;

said housing comprising at least one wall that defines an opening after said housing is situated between said adjacent spinal bones to permit post-placement loading of graft material;

a cover for covering said opening to facilitate preventing anterior migration of said graft material; and

said cover being adapted to be secured to at least one of said adjacent spinal bones such that it permits said housing to migrate or float relative to said cover.

132. (Original) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 131 wherein said housing is generally U-shaped.

133. (Previously Presented) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 131 wherein said housing surrounds said graft area and cooperates with said adjacent spinal bones to define a caged area comprising a predetermined shape and defining an anterior opening to permit said post-placement loading of said graft material.

134. (Original) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 133 wherein said predetermined shape causes said graft material to be formed into a multi-sided fused coupling between said adjacent spinal bones.

135. (Original) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 133 wherein said predetermined shape defines a height of at least 2 millimeters and less than 180 millimeters.

136. (Cancelled)

137. (Previously Presented) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 131 wherein said cover is adapted to be secured to at least one of said adjacent spinal bones.

138. (Original) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 137 wherein said cover provides mechanical fixation of adjacent spinal bones.

139. (Previously Presented) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 138 wherein said cover permits said housing to move in response to motion or settling of said adjacent spinal bones.

140. (Previously Presented) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 137 wherein said cover is adapted to be secured to each of said adjacent spinal bones.

141. (Original) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 131 wherein a single cage is used during a multiple level vertebrectomy or discectomy in place of a plurality of spinal bones or plurality of discs, respectively.

142. (Original) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 131 wherein multiple cages are used during a multiple level vertebrectomy or discectomy in place of a plurality of spinal bones or plurality of discs, respectively.

143. (Currently Amended) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim ~~144~~ 131 wherein said cover is fitted to said housing either by mechanical attachment or by floating adjacency allowing for settling and controlled motion of adjacent spinal bones.

144. (Original) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 131 wherein said housing comprises migration preventers for preventing said housing from migrating toward a spinal cord or other neurological elements after said housing is situated between said adjacent spinal bones.

145. (Previously Presented) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 144 wherein said migration preventers comprise at least one tab.

146. (Previously Presented) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 144 wherein said migration preventers comprise a plurality of tabs that are adapted to engage said adjacent spinal bones when said housing is situated therebetween.

147. (Currently Amended) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 146 wherein each of said plurality of tabs are adapted to engage said adjacent spinal bones when said housing is situated therebetween.

148. (Previously Presented) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 131 wherein said housing further comprises:

a first wall portion and a second wall portion, said first and second wall portions being integrally formed into said housing and defining a channel area for receiving said cover.

Serial No. 10/675,361

149. (Original) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 148 wherein said first and second wall portions extend beyond said housing.

150. (Currently Amended) The spinal fusion system as ~~recite~~ recited in claim 148 wherein said first and second wall portions each ~~comprising~~ comprise a beveled edge, said cover also comprising beveled edges for mating with said beveled edges of said first and second wall portions when said cover is situated over said opening.

151. (Original) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 149 wherein said first and second wall portions extend beyond said housing and define a plurality of migration preventers for preventing said housing from migrating toward a spinal cord or other neurological structure after said housing is situated between said adjacent spinal bones.

152. (Previously Presented) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 148 wherein said migration preventers comprise a plurality of tabs defined by said first and second wall portions, said plurality of tabs adapted to engage said adjacent spinal bones when said housing is situated there between.

153. (Cancelled)

154. (Original) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 131 wherein said system further comprises at least one migration stop for preventing anterior migration of said housing.

155. (Original) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 154 wherein said spinal fusion system further comprises a cover for covering said opening, said at least one migration stop cooperating with said cover to prevent said anterior migration.

156. (Original) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 154 wherein said system further comprises a plurality of migration stops.

157. (Currently Amended) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 156 wherein said plurality of migration ~~stop~~ stops are cross members secured to said housing.

158. (Previously Presented) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 155 wherein said at least one migration stop is a cross member secured to said housing.

159. (Currently Amended) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 156 wherein said system further comprises a plurality of migration stops ~~prevent~~ preventing anterior migration of said housing.

160. (Previously Presented) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 159 wherein said plurality of migration stops cooperate with said cover to prevent said anterior migration.

161. (Previously Presented) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 159 wherein said system further comprises two migration stops.

162. (Previously Presented) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 131 wherein said spinal fusion system comprises a plurality of housings each comprising an opening for receiving graft material;

said cover covering said opening of each of said plurality of housings.

163. (Previously Presented) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 162 wherein said plurality of housings comprises a first housing adapted to be located between a first pair of spinal bones and a second housing adapted to be located between a second pair of spinal bones, said cover adapted to be secured to a plurality of spinal bones to thereby cover said openings.

164. (Original) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 162 wherein said cover is situated in operative relationship to said plurality of housings to allow for settling or motion of said spinal bones.

165. (Currently Amended) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 131 wherein said cover comprises at least one resilient detent associated with an opening for permitting a screw to be situated in said opening and adapted to be screwed into a spinal bone, said at least one resilient detent preventing said screw from withdrawing from said spinal bone.

166. (Previously Presented) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 165 wherein said at least one resilient detent comprises a spring detent integral with said cover.

167. (Previously Presented) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 131 wherein said cover comprises a generally planar member and an integral lock for preventing withdrawal of at least one screw.

168. (Currently Amended) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 167 wherein said generally planar member comprises a resilient member integrally formed in said ~~plate~~member and defining said integral lock;

said resilient member comprising a detent portion,

said resilient member moving from a home position when said at least one screw is received in said cover and returning to said home position after said at least one screw clears said detent portion.

169. (Currently Amended) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim ~~167~~ 168 wherein said resilient member is generally L-shaped in cross-section.

170. (Currently Amended) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim ~~169~~ 167 wherein said cover defines a ~~plate~~ generally planar member comprising at least one of the following compositions: titanium, stainless, or carbon fiber.

171. (Previously Presented) The spinal fusion system as recited in claim 131 wherein said cover comprises an integral lock for locking screws that are adapted to secure said cover to said adjacent spinal bones into a locked position after said screws are adapted to be secured to at least one of said adjacent spinal bones.

172. (Previously Presented) A method for fusing spinal bones together, comprising the steps of:

- removal of diseased or injured spinal bones and/or vertebral disks;
- situating either a single cage or a plurality of cages between remaining spinal bones, said cage or cages cooperating with said spinal bones to define an anterior opening for introducing graft or graft-like material with the purpose of generating a fusion between adjacent spinal bones into said graft area;
- situating graft material through said anterior opening and into said graft area;
- covering said anterior opening with a cover such that said cover permits either said single cage or said plurality of cages to migrate or float relative to said cover while performing said covering step; and
- securing said cover to a plurality of spinal bones.

173. (Currently Amended) The method as recited in claim 172 wherein said method further comprises the step of:

- inserting said single cage or plurality of cages between said spinal bones until at least one migration ~~preventer~~ preventer stops said cage from migrating toward a spinal cord or other neurological structure.

174. (Currently Amended) The method as recited in claim 173 wherein said method further comprises the step of:

- inserting said single cage or plurality of cages between said spinal bones until said at least one migration ~~preventer~~ preventer engages at least one of said spinal bones.

175. (Original) The method as recited in claim 172 wherein said covering step further comprises the step of securing a cover to said spinal bones in order to cover said opening.

176. (Currently Amended) The method as recited in claim 172 wherein at least one of said single cage or plurality of cages comprises a shape generally corresponding to a size of a single spinal bones bone.

177. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 172 wherein at least one of said single cage or plurality of cages comprises a shape generally corresponding to a size of multiple spinal bones.

178. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 172 wherein at least one of said single cage or plurality of cages comprises a shape generally corresponding to a size of a single vertebral disk.

179. (Currently Amended) The method as recited in claim 172 wherein at least one of said single cage or plurality of cages comprises a shape generally corresponding to a size of a multiple vertebral disks.

180. (Original) The method as recited in claim 172 wherein said method further comprises the step of:

situating a plurality of cages into a plurality of graft areas, each of said plurality of cages cooperating with a plurality of spinal bones to define a plurality of graft openings.

181. (Original) The method as recited in claim 180 wherein said method further comprises the step of:

securing a cover to said spinal bones, said cover covering each of said plurality of graft openings.

182. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 172 wherein said method further comprises the steps of:

removing said cover;

inserting a second cage into a second graft area between two spinal bones, said second cage cooperating with said spinal bones to define a second anterior opening for introducing graft material into said second graft area; and

securing a second cover to said spinal bones to cover said anterior opening and said second anterior opening, said second cover being longer than said cover.